

## CATHOLICISM AND PROTESTANTISM IN THE MODERN WORLD<sup>1</sup>

IN the course of history the relation of Catholicism and Protestantism undergoes, as it were, physiognomical transformations, which, while they do not affect the inmost dogmatic division, strike deep enough to impress on these two systems new and unforeseeable characteristics in different times and places. The essential division in belief, as a theological phenomenon, remains just what it is; and in view of this, it is impossible—even for men of good will—to explain it away or compromise on it. This undebatable and irreducible phenomenon can only be effaced by unity in the Faith. We do not wish primarily to treat of the relation of Catholicism and Protestantism from this purely theological aspect of dogmatic difference and reunion, although even our present consideration can only be read under this explicit proviso, and in view of this final and deepest problem. For if Catholicism and Protestantism are from one point of view and in modern history simply two great historical forces, we cannot on that account act as though the problem belonged only to the sphere of historical research into cultural spirituality. Beyond the scope of history there is an enquiry of theological import.

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We take as our starting point the fact that Catholicism and Protestantism appear on the stage of history as two forces, each of which presents a whole system of human cultural values, and so an entire totality of life. Ultimately, in the theological field, Catholicism and Protestantism are incommensurable—though even here some qualification is required. But as formative powers of history, as complete forms and formulas of historical existence, Catholicism and Protestantism are *fundamentally commensurable*. On this plane, then, we find a series of problems which is *common* to both. Even their very opposition continually creates a common point of contact for their opposing principles. We find, on this plane, a *relation* between Catholicism and Protestantism which has proved historically to be manageable and valuable, and which at the present time is well defined—a relation sometimes of enmity, sometimes of cold indifference, sometimes of an inner human nearness and readiness to understand. The ‘relation’ of Catholicism and Protestantism has then its own history and, moreover, its own ethos. It is not our purpose to show the history of this relation and the variations of this ethos, even in its general outlines. We have drawn attention to the fact solely to prepare the ground for the consideration of the problem which concerns us: the relation between Catholicism and Protestantism at the present time.

Catholicism and Protestantism now stand in one and the same historical compartment. No longer, as in the Middle Ages, does Catholicism stand in uncontested totality and exclusiveness; no longer, as in the first hundred years of the Renaissance and at the time of the early Counter-reformation, do Catholicism and Protestantism possess, in rigid territorial separation, their closed provinces of independent activity, which a final form of pure Catholic culture, the Baroque culture, had made possible. The first breach in the walls which separated Catholicism and Protestantism from each other, spiritually and socially, was made by the *Aufklärung*; an epoch which, if inglorious in some respects, was immensely important in the development of the history of Western Europe. Through its on-

slaught on all positive expressions of revealed Christianity, and its comparative criticism of the different Christian confessions according to a common standard—a process bringing help and advancement to the Catholic and the Protestant side alike—the *Aufklärung* produced for the first time a kind of spiritual freedom of intercourse between Catholicism and Protestantism. The French Revolution with its direct and indirect effects throughout Europe, was the signal for the dissolution of the territorial and social barriers between Catholicism and Protestantism. The German classical period bears witness to the existence of the new intellectual and social sphere, the *one* sphere which has taken the place of two. The German classics, it is true, grew up almost without exception on a non-Catholic soil, but they cannot be regarded as a typical and representative accomplishment of Protestant thought. In the Romantic period this new intellectual sphere is perfected, and bears internal witness to the fact inasmuch as the Romantic movement is carried on alike by Catholics and Protestants, and some of its leading personalities were even converted to Catholicism; though one could never say on that account that Romanticism was a Catholic phenomenon, as Baroque had been. One may here remember that the first third of the nineteenth century also brought the emancipation of Catholics in England, whereby in the heart of the Anglo-Saxon world there was begun at this other centre of European Protestantism a reciprocal penetration of the two spheres of Catholicism and Protestantism that was to be all-important in the future.

These facts are of minor significance. But they suffice to set before our eyes what is an indubitable event in our intellectual history: that Catholics and Protestants for a century and a half have lived together, intellectually and socially, in the same sphere, a sphere which is neither Catholic nor Protestant, nor yet just undenominational; but rather a single field of force in which the various efforts, Catholic and Protestant, Christian and secular, meet and penetrate each other in a single synthesis, both by mutual

co-operation and mutual opposition. For the study of the forms of the relation between Catholicism and Protestantism this means that we have got clean away from the period of the 'Counter-reformation,' in which culturally and sociologically Catholicism and Protestantism had existed independently each in its own closed compartment. This period of intellectual, political and cultural separation of Catholicism and Protestantism, in brief the period of the Counter-reformation, is finally over. The two compartments—this is an incontrovertible historical fact—have grown together into one. The classic confessional controversy of the early Counter-reformation was carried on on both sides, not merely as a struggle with religious heterodoxy, but as a defence against a whole way of life that went with it. In other words, the confessional polemic had an immediate and far-reaching *political* importance: in deciding between Catholicism and Protestantism men decided not only for this or that creed or form of public worship, but also for this or that political organization, these or those social principles and so forth. There was involved in this decision not only the soul's salvation and one or another form of personal life (and perhaps above and beyond that, this or that theory and ideal plan of the design of the universe), but also the real formation of all public interests. *We* can regard these once actual decisions only as matters of past history, attributing a wholly altered significance to such decisions, and assessing the animosities and harshnesses of the struggle only as things of the past.

The problem which faces us at the present time is a different one. Socially we are set no more among the symptoms of the Counter-reformation, and so our modernity forgets without hesitation the necessity and significance of that kind of intellectual opposition which was the peculiar nature of the social structure of that time. The relation between Catholicism and Protestantism will not to-day, at least in the sphere of European culture, be burdened and prejudiced by the necessity of the struggle against the menace of secularization of Church property on the one

hand, or the terror of the Inquisition on the other. The relation between Catholicism and Protestantism stands at present beyond the sphere of political relevance, that is, beyond an opposition of interests which has its repercussions in public politics. But the whole relation is thus transferred into quite a new sphere, at once more spiritual and more human. With this statement, disregarding degrees of comparison, I would like to make this absolute judgment: the necessities, both factual and moral, of the present position are other than under the signature of the Counter-reformation.

This new situation has brought with it its own illusions. The most obvious indeed, and moreover the grossest form of illusion, is usually only just touched upon in passing, and then compromised with; it consists, not unnaturally, in the simple fact that people have not realized that we have left behind the time of the Counter-reformation. Today the legendary figures of the Grand Inquisitor and the Protestant robber of churches and iconoclast are no longer to the fore. However just such recriminations may have been in a more or less remote past, there is absolutely no sense in using them as arguments in the situation as it is to-day. In an historical position in which such an attitude seems no longer even remotely justified, persistence in this mentality will bring itself into complete disgrace. We are accustomed to treat such an attitude as *kulturkämpferisch*, thus expanding an historical catchword into an objective category. It is clear that the *kulturkämpferisch* type has existed even among Catholics. But this attitude is always a grotesque self-contradiction; for the 'opponent' too will here be misunderstood only for the wrong reason, namely because the whole situation has been misunderstood and misconceived.

A more subtle, and so in some respects also a more hazardous and dangerous illusion, consists in the fact that people misconceive this 'more spiritual and more human' relation of Catholicism and Protestantism at the present day, and identify it with the settlement of the essential *theological* difference between the two. The danger is that

one may think the peculiar character of the present relation, namely inner human nearness and possibility of understanding, is the same as the solution of that quite different theological problem of the division in belief; or in other words that one may mistake the outer, phenomenal problems for those proper to theology. To those who confuse these two issues it will seem an anachronism, as well as a moral blunder, to talk of dogmatic divisions, which appear to prevent the finish of a useless and too long drawn out conflict. I do not mean to describe more closely here the different forms in which this view finds expression, and which have recently re-appeared in the idea of a 'German national church.' But even in the sphere of church history proper this ideology has found some degree of realization, that is to say, its realization has been sought, and to-day it must be considered to have failed—and to have failed of necessity. I am thinking, as is easy to guess, of the so-called 'oecumenical' movement.

The work of Christian reunion, as it presented itself to the mind of the fascinating but untheological Söderblom, was to reunite 'Pauline' (Protestant), 'Johannine' (Orthodox), and 'Petrine' (Catholic) Christianity in a new synthesis. It seemed to Söderblom that we had outgrown the time for dogmatic reunion, and what he considered the specifically Roman Catholic method of absorption (absorption of the other churches into the Papal church) appeared to him un-Christian. We see here (what is quite typical of that denial) the human intellectual nearness in which, in the single sphere of life as it is now, the different Christian denominations have met, confused with the vital theological problem of the division of belief and its possible conquest. Even for a Protestant audience Rome's inability to co-operate here, hardly needs an apology, but for a decade in that fair oecumenical springtime it was inevitably bound to be misunderstood and misrepresented. Yet—I may here add this, though it is no longer of strict relevance—the oecumenical movement has not perished from the crisis that broke out from within (the crisis of its ideology); it has, unnoticed by the public and perhaps in the course of

events not immediately understood even by many interested parties, changed radically, undertaking quite a new line of more simple matter of fact theological work which is not corrupted in advance by an untenable ideology. The oecumenical movement in its original conception and its first phase, now past and done with—the phase of the great pan-Christian conferences and ‘delegations’—is the most typical example of the coercion of the theological realities of belief, confession, and Church to an untheologically conceived ideology of unity. That quest was bound to fail, not because it was premature, but because it is altogether impossible to realize it in this form.

That is a relevant fact, not only with reference to the relation of Catholicism and Protestantism, but quite as much—as has become clear to-day—with reference to the different denominations of Protestantism in their own mutual relations. The moderate, well-defined confessional denominations of Protestant-Evangelical Christianity (Lutheranism, Calvinism and Anglicanism, to name only the most important types) are, it is true, internally reformable (this fact is posed differently for the different types, and is in no case perfectly clear and admissible of an unequivocal answer), but if they are capable of being revised, then they are more than the documentary records of an antiquated spirituality, and of a problem which has to-day lost its meaning. If believing Protestantism in Germany to-day reaffirms its old confessions, and this only in virtue of bonds of blood, then we reject it; if rather in bonds of the spirit, we admit it; if in bonds of the Holy Spirit, then, in accordance with the deepest nature of Catholic principles of faith, we can only yield it an unqualified assent. Believing Protestantism will not allow its historic confessions of faith to be reft from it. For us Catholics this faithfulness to confession is not only humanly venerable; those confessions have also the power to awaken in us a feeling of reverence, provided that we understand their modern function as the substance of a positive evangelical Christianity, and not, according to their significance in the past, as the signs of schism from the Catholic Church. And

if God will bring out of them a people whose hour we know not, to whom it will be granted to carry out the reuniting of belief, then we can be certain that this event will be brought about by means of, not over the heads of, denominational beliefs. The historic confessional formularies of the different Protestant denominations are not merely (in the view of Catholics) the chief cause of the schism, they are also the last, the only bulwark of positive Christianity within the Protestant world. If these bulwarks were to fall, not because their temporary but necessary function is given back to the mother Church, but because they are abandoned, thrown over and given up, then would the Reformation have ended horribly and as a caricature of itself. The reformed confessions keep Protestantism outside the Catholic Church, but they also keep it fast within the doors of the Church. Paradoxical though it may sound, the reformed confessions, instruments of the schism, are also pledges for the anticipation of eventual reunion.

But will not this return to the old estimate of the reformed confessions as the foundations of evangelical Christianity in the wide sphere of modern Protestantism, permit also in the relation of Catholicism and Protestantism, the introduction of new tensions, or rather the revival of old ones, so that we Catholics can regard that new consciousness, in itself a matter for rejoicing, only, so to speak, with mixed feelings? Will not on that account the 'confessional peace' to which we have found our way laboriously on both sides by good will, be exposed to new infections and new dangers? Certainly the question is not in itself unwarrantable, but we can in no case identify ourselves with the cares which give expression to it. The sincere love of truth must take first place. We Catholics must prefer to be classed as members of the Church of Antichrist by the serious mind and incorruptible good sense of such a theologian as Karl Barth than that Ernst Bergmann should tolerate, and in tolerating domesticate, Catholic priests and some secondary and relatively unimportant accessories of Catholicism in his 'German national church.'



We can bear it quietly and calmly, yes, we shall gladly grow accustomed to it once more, if Protestantism yet again finds its full reaffirmation in opposition to our Church, provided only that this expression makes explicit the true religious and theological causes behind the Reformation, and does not mean anything at all *kulturkämpferisch*. Truth will be better served if we stand opposed face to face, with between us the pure, inexpugnable, inexorable problems of the theological issue. The possibility of somehow overcoming once for all the distances that divide us is greater if the distances are clearly thought out, the divisions clearly estimated and considered.

The 'confessional peace' is a secular institution, as the confession itself is a secular institution. The Church belongs to the theological, the denomination to the secular order. Confessional peace is nothing else than the expression of the fact that to-day the different Christian communions no longer have command each over a single social sphere, but live together in one common sphere, which is also the sphere of the modern secular community, and of the modern democratic, and for the most part non-religious State. The churches are no longer solid expressions of social, domestic, and political systems, which they are concerned to assure and defend together with what is their confession for the time being. The different communities of belief, then, live side by side to-day in a 'confessional peace' which is the peace of secular community. Confessional peace, this 'secular peace between the denominations' is a real good, but a good only of the secular order. It will, therefore, continue unchanged in every way so long as it is only a question of this good within the secular order, and so within the limits of its own character. But it is impossible for any purely theological discussion about affairs of dogma and church to be settled under the pretext of preserving the confessional peace. The good of truth belongs to a higher order than does confessional peace, and it would doubtless be a most dangerous undertaking, as well as a gross misunderstanding, if one was to build up on an alleged absolute and unconditional precept

of peace inside and between the churches, the obligation to maintain a precinct closed to theology. In questions of truth there can be no closed precincts.

In other words, the confessional peace is to continue, and to remain what it is, *viz.*, the mutual contentment of the confessions within a secular sphere—but *theology must be kept separate from secular considerations*. Theology, for us in this context the question of *truth*, has to take itself apart from the spirit of this secular sphere. In the search for truth there are landmarks and boundary stones, and we may not like to be reminded of it. Perhaps this is already quite different nowadays, and it is well so. The secular sphere has become for us of to-day a problematic magnitude; we can to some extent trace its genesis to the great western process of secularization, and thereby we have put a measure to it which for a previous generation was lacking. Thus there has been rewon a freedom for the things of the spirit, which is not to be confused with the liberal maxim, 'Thought is free,' but which means on the contrary that we once more safely set up in the kingdom of truth the boundary stones and landmarks without which the idea, the *summum bonum* of truth, to which every Christian community is bound, evaporates and becomes a mere liberal catchword. So too no secular authority—it might here be a question of the English Parliament in the decline of the Anglican Church, or of similar relationships in other countries and churches where the State authority can to a certain extent assert a legal claim, founded in the beginnings of the Reformation, to have a say in the settlement of church affairs,—I say that for that reason no secular authority can take away from or deprive the Christian communities of the sole responsibility in questions pertaining to matters of church or theology.

Questions of this kind cannot be bargained over. This is a principle which holds for every single Christian denomination in its relation to the State authority. And the central theological problems, (we do not want to call them points of dispute), cannot be artificially limited, a principle which holds for the different Christian denomina-

tions in their mutual relations, and so above all for the relation between Catholicism and Protestantism. The fact of differences of belief as we have said, cannot and must not be covered up and trifled with, through the two sides never accustoming themselves to live as peaceful neighbours in a secular sphere of existence. That does not mean that we want to concentrate on breeding an everlasting succession of intrigues. It does not mean 'that we cannot and will not accommodate ourselves to historical matters of fact.' It means just this, that there is here no safe agreement possible. If we speak of the difference of belief we mean that it is a thorn in the flesh of the peoples of the West, but one whose existence cannot be ignored. But the one *historical* fact which demands unqualified recognition from us, Catholics and Protestants alike, is that Catholicism and Protestantism no longer each have control over one single sphere of existence, and that in the common sphere in which both are bound together by the evolution of history there is neither any definite nor indefinite possibility of their contesting each other's right to exist or to develop fully their own religious life.

And on these lines we can now go a step further. Catholicism and Protestantism are now neighbours in the same common sphere of which we have spoken so much, the secular world. In this secular sphere the right of the two great types of confession, Catholicism and Protestantism, to live and develop in fundamental opposition cannot be contested. We have shown the reason why. This indisputability of development of religious and church life demanded for Catholicism and Protestantism and mutually preserved by them, involves no glossing over the division in belief, which was indeed only thought possible for reasons of secular convenience. The theological questions at issue between them remain for ever explicitly reserved; they cannot, as was said, be artificially limited.

But there is another possibility, and one required by the present historical situation to which we are all without exception tied. *Catholicism and Protestantism stand in this sphere of the secular world as the representatives of the*

*Christian tradition and the Christian way of life.* It is impossible and unthinkable that in the present condition of the world the two great confessional communities should not mutually recognize *this* dignity and this function, of being both of them the guardians and preservers of the Christian inheritance among our peoples and in our countries. In truth Protestants and Catholics here shoulder a common responsibility. This responsibility is laid on them by God. We must bow before the fact that the 'Christian front' is a divided front, and to change it is not to be left to the decision of a day or the power of mere good will. On the contrary, the immediate demand that we should be a wall of defence for the Christian inheritance admits of no delay.

Protestantism itself, indeed, on account of its own original dialectic, is at all times most strongly menaced by the impress of 'the world,' of secularism. The sharp antithesis between nature and grace in the theology of the reformers deprives every search for the true system of reality of any secure foundations and any unalterable standard. It allows no genuine system of natural rights. And even in the specifically theological field, the principles of the reformers fail to provide for the possibility and necessity of the penetration of the world by the supernatural; although at this point Anglican-Catholic tradition, revived during the last hundred years, cuts itself off from the genuine theology of the Reformation. Cast in a paradoxical form the theology of the reformers has the Cross, but lacks the Incarnation. And in proportion as this world is not ordered to things Christian, there is a danger that it will break in with disordered violence, and that its supremacy will be simply acknowledged. We do not say that such is the case, since we wish to give the critics the last word. Even Catholicism has piled up fault on fault in those forecourts of the sanctuary which are not defended by the special assistance of God, and has presented to the world the spectacle of human weakness and folly. We know better perhaps to-day about *mea maxima culpa* in these matters.

## BLACKFRIARS

But on this very fact that we, Protestants and Catholics, are meeting to-day with a dread time of judgment, and thus experience a terrible measure of the guilt that is ours, is based the promise and expectation of this hour. The consciousness which is awakened by God himself, into which we are led by the time of judgment, is in reality a heaven-sent quest for home: a quest for home started not only by the time of judgement, but by grace. This is the hour of purification. In the refining fire we grow or we are extirpated. In that hour to him that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away (Matth. 25, 29). But growth is the work of *grace*: it is grace which grows in us. And on that is based a hope which *humanly speaking* is not only quite unlikely to be fulfilled, but also quite unimaginable and nonsensical, but which has everything in its favour, since, as the Apostle assures us, nothing can withstand God: the hope that through the mystical power of the purification, Protestantism and Catholicism will grow together in every way more closely and more deeply—will grow together not so much on a level, side by side, but in obedience to the operation of a mysterious mighty power, in the direction of their centre, Jesus Christ. Then—and with this we add our last point, of which we have not been able to make special mention hitherto, but which has none the less been ever present to us, and is not invalidated in its supernatural validity by our divisions in belief: Protestants and Catholics are for ever bound together in God's sight by the sacramental sign of Holy Baptism. By the power of this holy sign, both they and we are set in the reality of the Body of Christ.

OSKAR BAUHOFFER.

(*Translated by H. C. Thomas*)